

Pre-Emption House  
Naperville, Illinois

Du Page Co

HABS -26-5  
HABS  
ILL,  
22-NAPVI,  
-1-

*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District No. 26

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Earl H. Reed, Jr., District Officer  
Room 404, No. 520 No. Michigan Ave.  
Chicago, Illinois

PRE-EMPTION HOUSE  
DU PAGE COUNTY  
NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

DISTRICT NO. 26  
NORTHERN ILLINOIS

EARL H. REED, JR.  
DISTRICT OFFICER

Project No. 26-5

By W.J. O'Connor

SOURCE

History Naperville was the terminus of the of County "plank road" and the Pre-Emption House was of DuPage the focal point of all activities. This by C.W. great thoroughfare between Galena, Illinois Richmond and Chicago passed through Naperville and and was the direct cause of the rapid decline H.F.Vall- of this city. Because of the heavy traffic ette. thru the town to and from Chicago a stock company was formed and a plank road was built from Naperville to Chicago. As Mr. Hunt, one of the towns early citizens remarked "Yes, we thought that we had a good thing when we got the plank road. Our town was always crowded with farmers on their way to Chicago. They came from miles around as this was the only good road to Chicago." "Naperville was a busy place for a number of years," continued Mr. Hunt, "But it didn't last. No. The railroad killed us, or rather we killed ourselves by refusing to admit the railroad and causing them to go elsewhere."

Naperville sank from the busiest and merriest town in Illinois to the pokiest and deadest, and all because the people could not see the difference between a plank and a rail.

The Pre-Emption House was built by George Laird, a carpenter by trade in 1834. The House today is the same as when built by Laird, except for the addition of the north or rear wing, and new window panes (which have replaced some of the tiny ones), and numerous alterations to interior portions, and replacing at least three times the flooring thruout the first floor. The original floors were of walnut, while the interior trim is of white pine painted white. The original butter-nut shingles were hand made, but at present are covered with roll roofing.

The framework throuout the building is of oak, hewn out of timber cut on the job and the clapboards are of black walnut.

From Mr. Laird the Pre-Emption House passed into the hands of a General E.B. Bill and from him to S.F. Hiltenbrand and is still under control of the Hiltenbrand estate for which Mrs. Laura Barenbrugge of Naperville is at present acting as agent.

It is commonly claimed that the Pre-Emption House is the oldest continuously operated tavern in the State. Its very striking name was derived from the "Pre-Emption Law", an act which enabled settlers to take up Indian lands previous to government opening and perfect title afterwards, with frequent and flagrant injustice to Indian owners.

By

*William J. Connor*

January 17, 1934

Approved

*Garret Neely*  
District Officer*Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.*